BACK TRACK

Interval Ladders

BY ANDY ELLIS

FACED WITH IMPROVIS-ing over chord changes, most of us turn to scale maps for melodic inspiration. But for variety's sake, it's good to try other approaches from time to time. One alternate route is to construct simple interval structures and use them as ladders to move up and down the fretboard. This technique is easy and fun, and the results sound quite different from scale-based soloing.

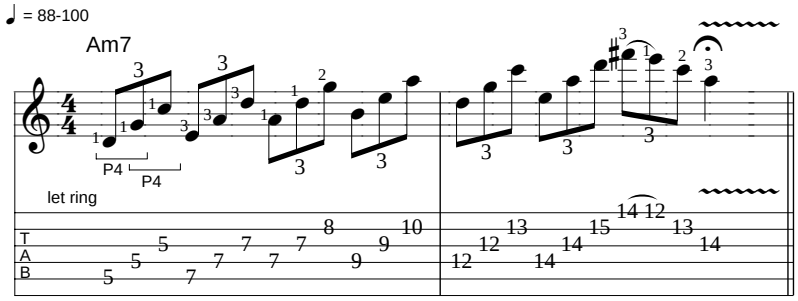
Stretching out. Suppose you want to spin a line over *Am7*. You could whip through an *A* Dorian pattern, for instance, or one of several other *A* minor scales. Or, thinking intervallically, you could construct a passage based around pairs of perfect fourths (P4), as in **Ex. 1**. For six beats, we play triplets composed of back-to-back fourths: *D-G-C*, *E-A-D*, *A-D-G*, and so on. This particular construction allows us to start each beat on a note from the *A* minor pentatonic scale—and remain within the scale as we ascend two octaves from the 5th fret to the 15th—yet the melody's strict "fourthness" gives it an angular, open quality.

Such interval-based lines typically sound harmonically ambiguous, so at some point you'll want to abandon the recurring pattern and resolve the phrase with consonant chord tones. (A burst of ambiguity sounds fresh, but once in this zone, it's easy to overstay your welcome.) Here, we wrap things up with an *Am6* arpeggio (bar 2, beats three and four). Digital delay sounds nice on this rolling figure.

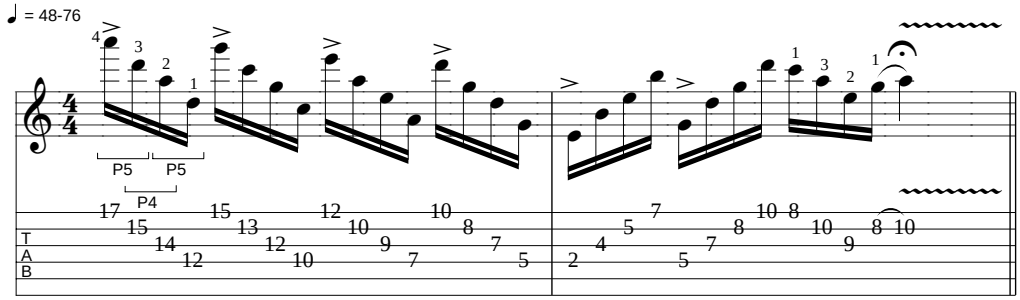
Mixed intervals. In **Ex. 2**, we tackle a more complex structure: a perfect fourth sandwiched between two perfect fifths. As shown, each beat consists of four sixteenth-notes spaced by three intervals (P5-P4-P5). As in the previous example, we conclude with an arpeggio—this time an *Am7*. The six tones used here (*A*, *B*, *C*, *D*, *E*, *G*) belong to both *A* natural minor (also called *A* Aeolian) and *A* Dorian, yet due to the passage's intervallic construction, it doesn't sound scale-like. Your fretting hand gets a workout with this one, so start slowly and strive for clarity and accuracy. Accenting the downbeats imposes rhythmic order on these waves of intervals. Try this example with some gentle phasing or flanging.

Chimey scales. If you're crafty, you can even play a descending or ascending scale as a series of intervals. **Ex. 3**'s descending *A* Dorian pattern is as scaly as it gets. But look closely—see how the notes are

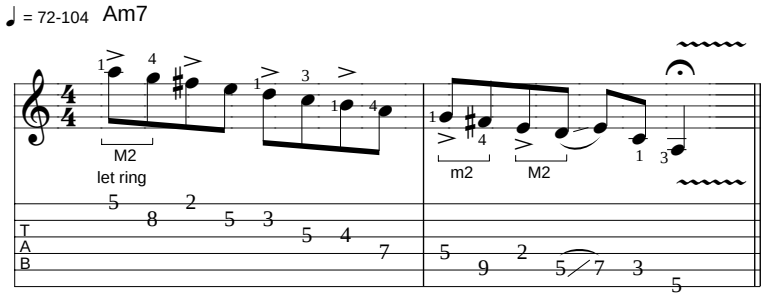
Ex. 1



Ex. 2

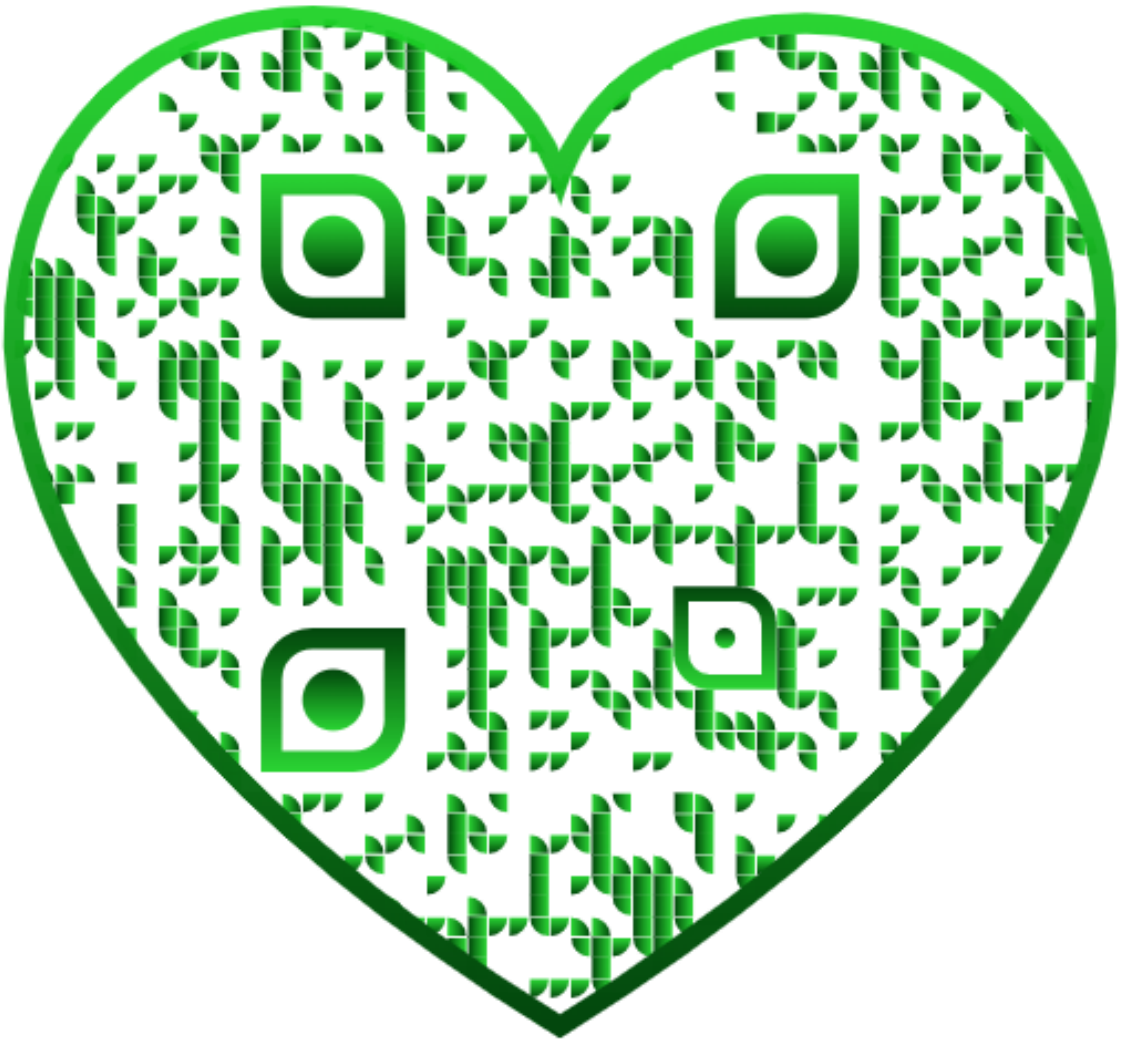


Ex. 3



BACK TRACKING

For more information on the **Dorian** and **Aeolian** modes, read "Modes in a Nutshell," "Dancing with Dorian," and "Artful Aeolian" in the Oct. '99, Nov. '99, and Feb. '00 issues respectively. To explore **intervals** on the fretboard, see "X-Ray Specs" in the June '99 *GP*.



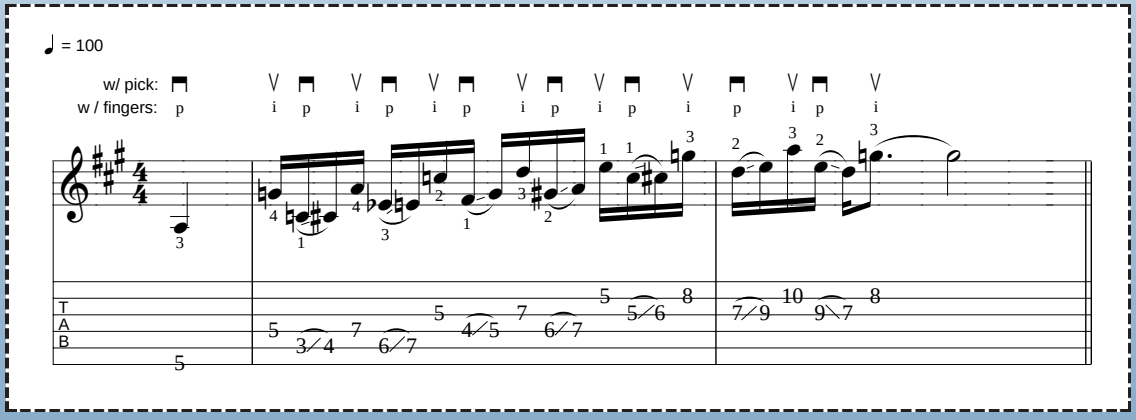
played as a series of seconds? The fingering is designed to let you fret two strings at a time, so be sure to let the notes ring and clang together. The intervals descend as major seconds (M2), the exception being bar 2, beat one, which is a minor second (m2). Once again, we end with an arpeggio—this time a simple *Am*. This line sounds extra cool with surfy reverb.

The hunt. You can tear apart *all* your scale patterns in search of interval structures. It's a great way to learn the notes on the fretboard while stretching your fingers. You'll also start hearing melodies differently—a powerful payoff for your efforts.

Lick of the Month

EAST MEETS WEST

THIS MONTH'S LICK CHAMP is Arlon Menchion, of Lexington Park, Maryland. "What do you get," he asks, "when you cross John Scofield's hip-hop-bop lines with the smooth chromaticism of Larry Carlton? That's right—this Lick of the Month." Whether you play this collision of East and West Coast jazz with a plectrum or your fingertips, follow the picking indications shown above the staff, and strive for smooth, legato phrasing.



Send us your candidate for Lick of the Month (preferably notated *and* on cassette), along with a brief explanation of why it's cool and how to play it. If we select your offering, you'll get a funky custom T-shirt that's available *only* to Lick of the Month club members. Mail your entry to Lick of the Month, *Guitar Player*, 2800 Campus Dr., San Mateo, CA 94403. Include your name, address, and phone number. Materials won't be returned, and please don't call the office to check the status of your submission. You'll get your shirt if your lick is chosen.